

# The Eight Founding Clubs of The Garden Club of Virginia

## Featuring the James River Garden Club (4th in series)

Excerpts from Follow the Green Arrow I

*In the search for the perfect title several husbands made recommendations with tongue in and out of cheek. The husband of a former president suggested, "In the beginning, there was The Garden Club of Virginia," adding, "Well, I'll tell you one thing of them, there shall be no end!" In appreciation for the certainty of his second statement, we'll use his first and start with: In the beginning, there were eight garden clubs that came together in 1920 to found the GCV. What they were and what they had done, they brought to this formation council. Their early years are of interest. So in the order of their founding dates let's see how they began and how they continued to 1920.*

JAMES RIVER comes next on the Virginia scene. Mrs. Malvern C. Patterson, its founder and first president, wrote: "When the idea of organizing a garden club was suggested to me in March 1914 by Mrs. Francis King, I did not think it could be accomplished. I felt there were few people interested in gardening, but I did speak to a number about it. On March 1, 1915, about twenty met at Hillcrest (her home) and discussed the advisability of having a garden club. From that time on, there has been much enthusiasm."

Her friend, Mrs. King, was the author of *The Well Considered Garden* and president of both the Women's National Horticultural and the Horticultural Association of America. Mrs. Patterson had two main purposes for her garden club. First, she believed that an intelligent interest in gardening and an actual personal knowledge of flowers was basic. "We should do the work ourselves, even though we may have workmen under us. It is the only way to hold our interest." Second, she believed in service to the community. Admitting that this was not as controllable as one's own garden, she ended her first report with, "Let us settle these matters soon so that our time will not be consumed in discussion but better taken up in the study of plants and flowers." (This sentiment, more bluntly phrased, is still being expressed 55 years later.)

In World War I James River published a booklet on food conservation with many recipes from grandmothers who had developed them during a previous conflict, the Civil War. This sold for 10¢ a copy and the profit of \$20.00 went to the Red Cross.

A program of back yard vegetable gardens was initiated, together with the first community war garden for boys and girls. By 1919 they had contributed \$200.00 to a garden in Serbia, the garden being named for them, and also given financial aid for rebuilding the ruined gardens of France. To earn this money they too sold their produce at a curb market, which cost them 10¢ a day.

Early in 1920 they beautified the Lee Monument with plants and a grass plot. "Upkeep soon became such a problem that Miss Mary Lee took exception to the way the area looked." After much correspondence and discussion, the planting was finally removed. (From a letter, dated 1937, comes an interesting reference to this: "When Miss Mary Lee died, she left a sum of money to 'The Lee Monument' instead of 'for the maintenance of The Lee Monument.' So no one could accept the money and the legacy was returned to her estate.")

In May, 1920, Mrs. Thomas S. Wheelwright, James River President, invited seven other garden clubs to come to Richmond. Thus began the history of the GCV.